

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

### DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF SACRAMENTS

Our three days together here have tried to grasp a bit more clearly the changes that are now occurring in Christian theology, changes that may be the most radical since the movement away from the imaginative Semitic mentality of the biblical writings to the philosophical categories of Hellenic thought. But the change touches more than theologizing. The entirety of Christian faith and life is undergoing massive change, change that is both threatening and exciting.

For the bulk of Catholics no element of this shift is more noticeable than the change in sacramental liturgies. Altars turned to face the people, eucharistic prayer in the vernacular, regular confession of sins fading as a key religious practice for millions of Catholics, a new rite for adult initiation whose ecclesiological and sacramental implications are still largely unrealized—but these are only hints of what is to come. How long the road to adequate liturgical re-creation will be, how fast the pace of the journey—these are difficult to predict; but the road signs all indicate that we are on the way to profound and unprecedented shifts in Christian celebration of sacraments.

As the Christian people lives into that future, theology will have a critical role to play: discerning the right direction will not be easy, and the Christian community will need all the guidance it can get from disciplined memory of its roots and history and from applying contemporary knowledges to its faith and its experience of worship. What I would like to do in the time available is to suggest just one approach to reflecting theologically on the shift that is occurring in Christian sacraments.

We have become accustomed to the idea that in any such process of interpretation one or other pattern or model is employed, and the model I propose to use is that which is most central in Christianity's reinterpretation of human life, the model of Jesus' death and resurrection. There is a special appropriateness in applying this model to sacraments, since sacramental effectiveness lies in injecting this Passover significance into the lived experience of human beings. However, I do not intend to focus on the manner in which sacraments themselves employ this model of interpretation. Rather, I hope to see how this distinctively Christian death/resurrection mode of interpreting human existence can help us understand the process of sacraments' historical development.

Before I go further, it might be good to state the way in which I will use the word "sacrament." Though I hope that Christian understanding of "sacrament" will increasingly honor the fact that all human experience is sacramental and all Christian experience of life has distinctive Christian sacramentality, for the purposes of this talk I will use the word "sacrament" to refer to the more limited reality of sacramental ritual. It is the death and resurrection of this ritual that I wish to examine with you.

Since all of human life is touched by the meaning embodied in the life/death/new life experience of Jesus, it follows that there must be a special impact of this meaning on the symbols people use to understand their lives. If the course of human history is a sequence of deaths and resurrections as we give up a past to move into the newness of a future, the symbols that were so constitutive of that past as a human reality must themselves grow into words that in future speak to humans a meaning that they have never before heard. Like everything else, our symbols, and specifically our Christian symbols, must die in order to live; the new wine of Spirit-life cannot be contained in old wineskins. But how do sacramental symbols pass through death into resurrection?

I propose to formulate a hypothetical response to that question and then examine it in the light of three historical instances in which the death/resurrection pattern can be discerned. In doing this, I hope to suggest the dynamics of change that underlie our present-day sacramental situation. The three instances are the Babylonian exile of the people of Jerusalem, earliest Christianity's dialectical reaction to Jewish ritual, and the splintered attempts at liturgical reforms in sixteenth century Christianity.

#### STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

When we use the death/resurrection model we are, obviously, working with the metaphor of "life." However, we are dealing with more than just metaphor, because resurrection is new life, a kind of life that challenges us to understand more accurately the dimensions of "life" that are most properly human. Still, when we talk about the new life of resurrection, our thought is modeled by our ordinary experience of human life, of bodily spirituality, or conversely of self-aware bodiliness. And it is this human way of living, invisibility made visible, that is the foundation for Christian sacraments. Living sacramental ritual itself is an embodiment, embodiment of the enlivening power of divine presence, i.e., of God's spirit.

As biblical revelation developed, there was an increasing insight into the manner in which the spirit-power of God takes on form and manifestation through word. The Spirit of God is at once the source of life and of prophecy. This revelation culminates in Jesus, God's own embodied word, who exists prophetically as sacrament of God's presence in the power of Spirit. Authentic Christian sacramental liturgy is meant to "verbalize," to symbolize, to embody the continuing presence of God and of the risen Christ through the gift of their Spirit. Sacramental liturgy is, then, an intrinsic part of a life-process, the process of sustaining and nurturing those levels of life—thought, imagination, love, freedom—that are distinctively personal. Sacramental ritual is itself alive to the extent that it truly embodies this divine presence. When a ritual no longer serves to communicate a true understanding of how God is here and now giving Spirit-life to humans, it is not embodying the creative power of divine presence. When something that had been a living body is no longer that, it has died. So a ritual that once had lived and given life can become an empty corpse, a shell of meaningless religious practice.

We know that such death can come to any of our human symbols, sacramental ritual included; but can resurrection also come? Can the dry bones of dead liturgy become living flesh by the power of God's spirit?

In responding to this question it is essential that we work from an accurate Christian understanding of "resurrection." As referring to Jesus' victory over death and our sharing in that victory, resurrection is not resuscitation; it is passage into a distinctively new kind of human existing, an existing where bodiliness gives authentic and adequate expression to the creating power of the indwelling Spirit. The power of Christ's risen life does not bring things "back to life," the power of new wine does not remake the old wine skins. Rather, Spirit-life, by the creativity intrinsic to life itself, brings into being those forms through which it can find expression and fulfillment. Ritual forms, like human bodies, can be kept to look like bodies through careful mummification; they can even be resuscitated by artificial infusion of life; but when God's presence has migrated to other symbolic realities that express authentically the divine gift of life, it is these realities that bear true sacramental power.

When such a shift in divine saving presence occurs, there need not be, nor can there be, a total break with the earlier sacramental situation. Both the old and the new symbols are effective to the extent that they relate to people's life experience. It is human life itself which is the most basic word of God in which the Spirit moves. And though the Spirit moves this life eschatologically, towards ever new forms, this movement is developmental, it grows organically out of what has been and to some extent by the power of what has been.

There is a certain irreplaceable framework of human life experience—birth, growth, suffering, love, decision, success and failure, death—that gives similar shaping to the changing historical situations of humans. And it is precisely this fundamental and universal pattern of human experience that is word of God and that Christian sacraments are meant to trans-signify and thereby transform. The radical continuity of human existing as such and the abiding meaning of Christ's death and resurrection for that human existing are what root the continuity of Christian sacrament. Ritual forms by themselves are incapable of accomplishing this; deceptively continuous, they may actually bar the process of genuine continuity. Authentic liturgy must be allowed to emerge as symbolic celebration of what life experience itself is saying about the life-giving presence of God in the risen Christ and their Spirit. Like human history itself, sacramental liturgy must pass continuously through death into truly new life.

To test this theological reflection, let us turn to our three historical instances, the first of them being the Judaic experience of Babylonian exile.

#### JERUSALEM DESTROYED AND REBUILT

If one wishes to study the religious career of Israel theologically, i.e., from the perspective of God's role in Israel's development, the prophetic

experience of the great charismatic prophets is the logical point of entry, because it was through prophetic experience that the divine influence impacted on Israel's history. Thus, the searing experience through which the inhabitants of Jerusalem had to pass, the experience of Babylonian deportation and the destruction of their city and its temple, is forecast in the anguished spiritual struggle of Jeremiah. Even more importantly, Jeremiah's career and wrestling with God anticipate and provide guidance for the exiles as they strive to understand how their ambiguous history can continue to be a word of covenant election.

Like any devout Israelite of his day, Jeremiah begins with an assumption that the religious institutions of his day, divinely instituted as they are, provide both understanding and implementation of Yahweh's will. Even the kingship, whose history had not recommended it as an agent for nurturing Israel's faith, seemed finally to be realizing its religious destiny in the person of Josiah. But as one thing led to another, as he realized the lack of genuine support for the Deuteronomic reforms, as Josiah died prematurely in battle to be succeeded by puppet rulers, as so much of Jerusalem's official leadership seemed intent upon suicidal military adventure, Jeremiah came to doubt whether the religious structures of his day as they were could really be the instruments of Yahweh's salvation of his people. And so he cried for their reform, and longed for the day when those institutions would exist faithful to Yahweh.

However, the famous passage forecasting "the new covenant" seems to indicate that Jeremiah eventually entertained a much more drastic alternative: the religious institutions of Israel needed more than cleansing, they needed replacement. Basically, they were incapable of mediating the kind of personal salvation that Yahweh intended for his people. They would have to give way to a new era in which God would direct the lives of his own by "writing the law on their hearts" rather than by the guidance of external laws and social enforcement. The life-giving presence of God's Spirit was not confined to king or priest or prophet, to temple or festival or ritual, even to religious prescriptions of the Law. What provided continuity for God's action on Israel's behalf was his love of the people: the prophecy of the "new covenant," though it contains words of repudiation for the Mosaic covenant structures, ends with reiteration of the classic covenant promise, "I will be your God and you will be my people."

And so it happened. Without king or high priest or temple or sacrifice, the Jewish exiles were forced to reassess their identity as Israel, to find new and more "spiritual" modes of symbolizing the presence to them of their covenant God. It was then that they reach finally a clear monotheism, which in turn forces them to move away from their narrow nationalism. It was then that Israelitic prophecy, which had always insisted on the inner aspect of religious practice, moves with Malachias to the notion of a "spiritual sacrifice."

Yet, the movement was not complete and irreversible. Ezekiel, who himself looks for a "new covenant," translates this new era in terms of the

rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple. The temple will rise from the ashes to become once more the abode of God's saving power, the dry bones of Israel will again take on flesh and skin. This is not resurrection but resuscitation. It is the dream of restoration, unmistakably seen as such in Ezekiel's description of the rebuilt temple as "paradise regained." And it is the vision of the rebuilt Jerusalem Temple that provides the blueprint for the hierocratic Judaism that follows upon the Exile. The Judaism which emerges from the Exile is unquestionably something different; the past defies recapture. But in trying to insure the viability of rebuilt Jerusalem by canonizing the past and trying to recapture it, Judaism ran the danger of confining new life within suffocating forms. True life after death cannot be resuscitation; it can only be authentically new life, i.e., resurrection.

In a very profound way, Israel had been reborn in Babylon; a new basis and form of religious identity had emerged, religious conversion in response to threatened extinction had brought into being new levels of faith. Exile was truly a time of life; its pain was the pain of giving birth to this new life. But by and large it was not seen that way by the exiles themselves, particularly by those exiles who heeded the call to return to Jerusalem. Rather, the years of exile were looked upon as death, as a time when Israel had to wait for God's mercy to raise the holy city and its temple from the ashes. And so one wonders what happened to this new life that had come to be during the Exile years, a life that was not embodied in Jerusalem's traditional religious forms; did it endure when it was poured into the skins of scribal explanation of the book, of a temple establishment that exerted both religious and civil power through control of ritual, of an ethnic exclusivism that bordered on xenophobia? Did the *kebod Yahweh* return to the Holy of Holies as distinctively as Ezekiel's vision of the rebuilt temple would suggest?

Actually, the new life did survive, though the absence of prophetism may be a symptom of the weakened state of that life. The Spirit of God was working during those post-exilic centuries in the faith of the people; and since this faith found partial expression in structured elements like the temple rituals, life was at work in the religious institutions of Judaism. But we cannot avoid the question: to what extent did those ritual forms convey to people an understanding of what God was actually doing to save them? Even though the life experience of people, individually and socially, was undergoing major change, there was a reluctance to let that life express itself in any new religious forms, there was a reluctance to give up the old wine skins. This was a period—at least in Palestine—of growing traditionalism. It is this narrow approach to continuity with Israel's past, this confining of the expansive vitality of Spirit-life, that is rejected by Jesus and by primitive Christianity. Is this not what lies behind the gospel description of John the Baptist picking up the prophetic message of Malachias? This leads us, then, to our second historical instance.

#### JUDAISM "DERELIGIONIZED"

The divine "intervention" in the history of Israel that takes place

through prophetic experience finds its climax in Jesus, the eschatological prophet. If the religious experience of great charismatic prophets like Isaiah or Jeremiah provoked in their consciousness a radical challenge to the manner in which God's presence to his people had been institutionalized, we can only guess at the extent to which Jesus' "Abba experience" caused in him a basic discontent with the inadequacy of human religion. At the same time we are clearly dealing in Jesus with a person who had immense loyalty to and love for the deeply religious culture that was his as a Jew. It was, after all, within Judaism that his human discovery of God as his "Abba" took place. So, the case of Jesus provides a unique instance of the death/resurrection model, indeed that instance which is the primary paradigm.

The only period of Jesus' own religious experience for which we have any evidence is, of course, his public career. However, as reflected in the gospel narrative, that short period was the time when the critical transition in his own understanding seems to have taken place, and it is those years of public ministry that the earliest Christian traditions view as the reliving and vindication of Israel's religious history. During that time Jesus seems to have trod the same path as Jeremiah, though in more compressed form and more profoundly.

Jesus was a religiously devoted Jew. No matter how inadequate, the Jewish symbols—in law and synagogue service and temple ritual—were words about that God whose loving presence to him was the very source of Jesus' own self-identity. As originated in God's establishment of the Jews as his people, the official leaders and the religious forms of Jesus' day bore a claim to his acceptance, though he recognized their limitations and even their sinfulness. So, it would seem that he began his public teaching with the perspective of purifying and deepening the Judaism of his day; he saw established Judaism as still embodying in privileged fashion "the kingdom of God," i.e., the saving activity of his Abba.

As his public ministry advanced, however, and the official leaders—both priests and teachers—obstructed that working of God in himself which he experienced as "the arrival of the kingdom," Jesus did not experience the saving presence of God in the religious activity of these men. The guidance towards union with God that Torah should have provided was perverted into misguidance; exploitation of the powerless replaced that concern for "the little ones" that should have reflected God's own concern; by instilling ungrounded fear and religious anxiety into the people, religious leaders blocked the perception of God as loving and liberating.

On the contrary, in his own "non-official" care for people, in his teaching and healing and forgiving of sin, Jesus experienced the kingdom, the saving presence of God; and what sacramentalized this life-giving power of the Spirit was not some religious ritual but the "secular" sign of Jesus' own human concern and ministry. The more that the official structures of Judaism became for him expressions of hatefulness and blindness and perverted power, the more they died for him as authentically

sacramental. Instead, he seems to have discovered the presence of life-giving divine power in other situations—in friends gathered for a meal, in the unguarded love of children, in the divine support of seasons and nature's growth, and always and foremost in his own loving concern to help and heal people.

Yet, it was only with his approaching death and his increased tendency to identify his role against the backdrop of Isaiah 52-53 that Jesus seems to have intuited the need for a radically different alternative to Jewish religion as he knew it. Perhaps he saw the inevitable rejection of formalized Judaism in terms of the "end of the world" and the eschatological fulfillment. Perhaps he sensed only that Jewish official institutions were too rigid to accommodate the changes implied in a God who was "Abba." Perhaps he identified God's action in himself as the arrival of that "new covenant" foretold by his prophetic forerunners—the traditions about the final supper that underlie the passion narratives point this last direction.

We cannot say with any certainty. What is more certain is earliest Christianity's reaction to Jewish religious forms in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection, for to this the New Testament literature bears more direct evidence. Without describing again the well-known struggles of first-century Christianity to clarify its relationship with Judaism, we can simply point to Paul's successful effort to free from the restrictions of Judaism those Christians who did not elect to become Jewish Christians—and realize that as early as the mid-50's there was a developed theological position which recognized that the new reality that had occurred in Jesus' death and resurrection was definitively liberated from the ritual symbolisms of Judaism. Instead of a building that could be identified as "the house of God" it was the community of believers that bespoke the saving presence of God. Instead of the distinguishing and divisive physical sign of circumcision, it was now a life-style of concerned love that marked out God's people. There was not Sabbath as sacred time; there was no special holy group of priests; there were no sacrificial rites.

One could interpret all this as an absence of religious symbolism, of sacramental ritual, in those early Christian decades; but obviously such was not the case. Rather, it was a question of where they experienced the saving presence of God in the risen Christ. What realities or what happenings were signs that Christ's Spirit was at work to bring the kingdom to its fulfillment? Where was the Christianization, i.e., the sacralization, of creation and history taking place?

Without too much argument I think that one could reply that Christian communities were themselves the key sacrament of the saving presence of God in the risen one and his Spirit. It was the experience of sharing faith with one's fellow believers that told these early Christians that Jesus was truly risen and among them and that they were saved from evil and death. Nothing in their shared experience was thought of as "secular" and therefore excluded from signifying the presence of the Lord. Certainly, actions like their coming together to break the bread in the name of Jesus were seen as specially significant and were therefore quickly ritualized, but

the ritual forms emerged organically as expressions of their living remembrance of Jesus and their lived experience of being his disciples.

Exactly how it happened is not clear, but this very early a-cultic situation vanished quite rapidly. For one thing, all through this first century there were some who felt they must tie Christian worship to the ritual forms of Jewish sacrifice; the Epistle to the Hebrews is one indication of Christian need to justify the refusal of this demand. Second-century Christianity did not capitulate to this demand, it did not directly realign itself with its cultic roots in Judaism, but it did move again to the mentality in which the religiously sacred was separated from the other elements of human life. Even before the year 200, the word *hiericus* begins to be applied to bishops, and the eucharist begins to be described as a sacrifice enacted at an altar instead of a meal shared at a table.

Second-century apologetes do still point to the basic lifestyle of Christian communities as the sign of divine presence; the fact that martyrdom can come to any Christian continues to act as an equalizing influence within the Church in defiance of the tendency to develop a specially sacred body of professional Christians; but Justin's remark about the laity's insisting that the "Amen" at the end of the eucharistic prayer belongs to them reflects the developing liturgical division of persons within the Church. We are still a long way from that disastrous application of allegorical interpretation to sacraments which we associate with Amalric in the Carolingian period or with Gabriel Biel in the fourteenth century; but when the language of the ordination prayer in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus is compared with the roughly contemporary ordination prayer of Serapion, the former looks very much like an early stage of the trajectory that will lead to these later developments. Earlier than Hippolytus, the first Clementine letter in describing *presbyteroi* and *episkopoi* with imagery recalling Jewish priesthood implicitly attributes to Christian leaders that separated-off sacrality which most of earliest Christianity had repudiated.

Unquestionably, one must be very cautious about drawing conclusions from such relatively fragmentary evidence. Yet, it does seem that Christians increasingly viewed the presence of God's saving action as focused on special religious situations in which only certain Christians could function as agents of sacramental effectiveness. This tendency was quickly strengthened by the negativity towards human sexuality which infiltrated Christianity and which, by suggesting a radical incompatibility between the sexual and the sacred, banished the human family as an appropriate model for thinking about Christianity and severely obscured the fundamental sacramentality of Christian love.

But was God's saving action increasingly confined because official views decided that it was? Did God honor, for instance, Cyprian's understanding that "outside the church there was no salvation"? Were family gatherings for meals at which Christians shared with one another their faith in the risen Lord less eucharistically effective than they had been in Christianity's early decades? Did the love experienced by Christian spouses



signify less the saving power of Christ's gift to his church? Did the down-to-earth care and concern of Christians for one another cease to sacramentalize God's own loving concern? Did not the life-power of Christ's spirit continue to animate these fundamentally sacramental elements of Christian life?

I believe that one has to answer such questions both "yes" and "no." On the one side, we can certainly say that what we humanly call "the divine intent" did not change; the nature and goal of Christ's risen presence to human history were not altered; ordinary human life did not lose its potentiality for acquiring Christian sacramentality. But, on the other hand, symbols function to the extent that their significance is perceived; and if people are instructed that full Christian meaning can belong only to a privileged portion of life they inevitably lose appreciation for the sacramentality of the rest of their experience. The loss is great enough if much of life is no longer seen to be significantly Christian, but the other side of the coin is that the creative life-force of the Spirit that works in this day-by-day experience of Christians no longer flows organically into the sacramental rituals—deprived of this life, ritual symbols grow feeble and moribund.

In looking at these very early Christian developments we are perhaps extrapolating too much from the evidences we have marshalled. But the ensuing centuries seem to reflect an abiding dialectic tension within Christian life: there was an inner life force that did find expression in the emerging patterns of church structure and practice, but never with abiding satisfaction. At certain points the ferment of the Spirit's working broke forth to create distinctively new social and religious forms. One can instance the exciting religio-cultural renaissance of the twelfth century which brought medieval culture to flower and produced patterns of thought and life which still influence us today, particularly in Western religion.

Yet, the evangelical exuberance and emerging Christian egalitarianism of the twelfth century proved too threatening to growing ecclesiastical bureaucracy and to established modes of thinking; and the Paris and Oxford condemnations of 1277 and 1278 signal a widening gulf between official church outlook and the emphasis on discovery and empirical verification that characterizes modern thought. With considerable justification, some historians of modern science begin their study with the year 1277. And from a theological perspective one must ask what the ecclesiastical insistence that emerging European life fit into already determined patterns did to limit the influence of Christianity on the history of ensuing centuries.

There is a special application of all this to Christian sacraments. Eleventh and twelfth century saw a heated and not too illuminating controversy about religious symbols; but the more important promise of sacramental insight lay in the new appreciation for sensible creation that was manifested in the School of Chartres and even in the development of Cistercian and Victorine spirituality. Hugh of St. Victor in his influential

*De sacramentis* uses the term "sacrament" so broadly that it is difficult to see precisely how special claim to this term can be made for those liturgical events we are accustomed to call "sacraments." Yet, this is precisely the point: sacramentality extends to the entirety of sensible creation; by the very nature of things the material world is the external symbol of the creative life forces working within it. Christian liturgies bear a particular and crowning significance within this broad sacramental universe.

But our theological treatises *De sacramentis* did not emerge from this mentality. Instead, as is well-recognized, it was the collection of patristic sayings about sacraments in Gratian's *Decretum* that flowed through Lombard's *Sentences* into the medieval Summas and far beyond. Thus, legal mentality and an excessive search for the clarity of definition limited application of the term "sacrament" to seven liturgical actions; this plus distorted notions of symbolic effectiveness that came by applying models of instrumental or moral causality resulted in a truncated understanding of Christian sacramentality that has plagued us up to the present.

Sacramentality, even specifically Christian sacramentality, did not disappear from all those non-ritual elements of medieval experience which had become so richly Christian in their meaning. But that meaning tended to become divorced from the experience of liturgy, life's Christian meaning did not flow into worship and find celebration there. Instead, the search for the significance of liturgy focused increasingly on allegorical and moralistic understandings; and the motivations for performing or attending ritual became increasingly ethical. Gabriel Biel's lengthy *Canonis Missae Expositio* is a classic instance of such allegorical explanation and of the extent to which the basic human experience of those gathered to celebrate the Lord's Supper is ignored as not significant and therefore left unrelated to eucharist.

#### REFORMATION AND COUNTER-REFORMATION

Mention of Biel brings us to that disturbed period when the medieval world began to dissolve into what we think of as the birth of modernity—and to our third instance, the fragmented liturgical reforms of the sixteenth century. Time does not permit even the briefest review of the diverse Reformation responses to the late medieval decadence of Christian liturgy. Instead, I would like to concentrate on Roman Catholicism's official response as manifested in the decrees of Trent and the ensuing liturgical reform of Pius V.

Prior to Trent, indeed prior to the whole upheaval of the sixteenth century, there had been more than one voice raised in protest against widespread encouragement of credulity about the eucharist and against the abuses of eucharistic celebration connected to the benefice system. One thinks for instance of the theologically careful and pedagogically revolutionary approach of a Jean Gerson or of the Christ-centered spirituality of the *devotio moderna*. But here, too, in the beautiful fourth book of the *Imitation of Christ* which focuses on the eucharist, one can notice the extent to which insight into the meaning of eucharist is divorced from the

meaning of everyday life.

To a very great extent sacramental liturgies had ceased to provide for people the means to understand and interiorize that saving action of God which was symbolized in the ritual forms. Instead, sacramental rituals were understood to be standardized sacred actions by which a priest who had been given special powers in ordination could free people from their sins—even if the sinful individuals did not themselves share in the sacramental action. Apart from the celebrant who “administered” sacraments, the people thought of themselves as “receiving sacraments”; liturgy was a situation where at best the faithful had to be present so that something could be done to them. The basic Christian sacramentality of their lives was not something that sacrament celebrated; instead, as that incredibly influential handbook of medieval pastoral practice, the *De cura pastoralis* of Gregory the Great, suggests, most people’s daily life was something to be regretted and repented of rather than gratefully celebrated.

All of this is to say that sacramental ritual, as intrinsically effective religious symbol, was dying if not dead. Reacting against the radical Reformation tendency to shunt off what it saw as a ritual corpse and replace it with strictly biblical challenge to Christian faith, the Council of Trent took the high road, viewed the sacramental rituals from the side of divine action, and insisted that God’s granting of grace occurred whenever the church enacted sacrament through the agency of one of its ordained ministers. Though it did not reject a necessary role for faith on the part of those “receiving” sacraments, and though it is a distortion of the Council’s view to interpret the phrase *ex opere operato* in a magical sense, Trent certainly did focus on the “objective effectiveness” of the ritual form itself as a medium through which divine saving activity could touch the faithful.

This doctrinal perspective was reflected in the liturgical reforms of Pius V consequent to the Council. Given the confused context of the sixteenth century when it was a question of avoiding utter catastrophe, not of seeking an ideal, one can understand why Pius V dealt with liturgical reform as he did. But whatever the dynamics of the prudential judgment taken then, the reforms were not calculated to foster changes that would allow the inner life of ritual symbol to find appropriate externalization. Chaos seemed to be the principal threat, so absolute homogeneity of word and gesture was imposed as a source of uniformity if not of unity, rubrical observance became the principal criterion of authentic sacramental ceremony, and the very genuine eucharistic faith of many in Roman Catholicism was pumped into forms that were decreed to be unchanging.

For a number of reasons, among them the improved training of the men ordained for sacramental celebration, the liturgical scene after the Tridentine reforms was much improved. But one can ask whether the prescribed rituals truly regained their capacity to function symbolically as sacramental causes of transformed Christian consciousness or whether they were the occasions on which the presence of Christ touched the faith of people somewhat independently of the experienced significance of a given service. There was life, grace life, at work in these ritual situations;

but it was not so clear that the rituals themselves lived with the kind of life that is intrinsic to symbols. After the death and decay of liturgical practice in the late medieval centuries, sacramental rites were not allowed to move organically into new life forms; instead of genuine resurrection there was resuscitation.

Such a relatively artificial situation could endure for only so long; but while it did endure it blocked the full impact of sacramental ritual which the life of the Christian community requires. Deprived of a truly human dimension in their sacramental experience, deprived also of the experience of encountering the risen Christ in eucharistic ritual, many sincere Christians turned to devotional practices of one kind or another to express their own personal faith. The tendency to substitute patron saints and angels for Christ as mediator with the divine, a tendency historically rooted in the reaction against Arianism, now found new impetus. For most Christians even their relationship to Christ found devotional rather than liturgical expression.

Inevitably, the need for some kind of liturgical reform was felt, despite the success of church officials in conveying the notion that church unity was measured and nurtured by absolute homogeneity—in doctrine, in polity, and in liturgy. Most of us can recall, somewhat amused now by the arguments used against it, the liturgical movement's struggles to unthaw Christian rituals and to bring into being a liturgy that would speak to the people. It was a hard road to Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and its insistence that "more is required than the mere observance of the laws governing valid and licit celebration. It is the duty of pastors to ensure that the faithful take part knowingly, actively, and fruitfully" (11). "Christ's faithful when present at this mystery of faith should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary, through a proper appreciation of the rites and prayers they should participate knowingly, devoutly and actively" (48).

However, having traversed the road to Vatican II, we now know that it is not enough for the liturgy to speak to the people; authentic sacrament is the people speaking. True religious symbol must be the outgrowth and expression and celebration of what it means for a given group of people, at a given time and place, to be Christian. Only if ritual forms are allowed to evolve with human history itself can they continue to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus insofar as it is truly significant for a believing community. Like the church itself, sacramental ritual must be constantly moving into the future in order to remain alive. But if it does so, Christian sacrament cannot but become more what it is meant to be, celebration of Jesus' resurrection. To move faith-fully into the future is to move increasingly into the resurrection of Jesus, it is to live with risen life. If liturgy lives this way, it creates for people that incipient experience of resurrection which can transform them into Christians.

What, if any, conclusions can we draw from this all too rapid reflection on our Christian sacraments? I would suggest one that seems to be undeniable: namely, that sacramental liturgies must be allowed to emerge

from and express that Spirit-life of resurrection by which Christian communities themselves are meant to live as sacraments of the risen Lord. Theologians can help guide this process; they cannot bring it to be.

BERNARD COOKE  
*Holy Cross College*  
*Worcester*